

**MINUTES**  
**MERIWETHER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**WORK SESSION**

December 14, 2021 - 4:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Chairman Bryan Threadgill, Vice Chairman Alfred McCoy, Shirley Hines, Rosla Plant, and Beth Neely-Hadley

Staff Present: County Administrator Michelle Irizarry, Special Projects Director Theron Gay, County Clerk Beverly Thomas, County Attorney Nathan Lee, and Election Supervisor Patty Threadgill

Invited guest present: State Senator Randy Robertson, State House Representative Debbie Buckner, and State House Representative David Jenkins

Bryan Knight from the Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office participated by Zoom

Staff Absent: Finance Director Bill Gregory

**I. WELCOME** – Chairman Threadgill, 4:00 p.m.

**II. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Chairman Threadgill stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss redistricting. Chairman Threadgill then turned the meeting over to Representative Debbie Buckner.

Representative Buckner stated she is joined by Senator Randy Robertson and Representative David Jenkins would be arriving shortly. Representative Buckner was aware that Meriwether County had attended the online training sessions for redistricting. There are two steps to this process resulting from the Census. District lines must be redrawn in the Senate, House, Congress, School Board and County due to people moving. The House and Senate in Atlanta has already drawn District lines and Congressional maps have been completed. After receiving the Census Data, you must decide on what size the Districts will be. This happens when you divide the number of districts by the population. Every district must be as close to the same size as possible. Representative Jenkins arrived. Representative Buckner stated District areas sometimes have to be reapportioned. Usually, for Counties and Commissions like this, the Legislator from the area will go to the Reapportionment Office and ask for a minimal change map. The minimal change map takes the current map and makes sure the population in those districts are the right number with the new Census numbers. Representative Buckner requested a redistricting map for Meriwether County that was a minimal change. Due to a shift in population it had to be a little bit more than minimal. Bryan Knight, from the Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office in Atlanta, worked with Representative Buckner and with Representative Jenkins on the map he had drawn and is proposing. Representative Buckner stated whether it is one of these maps or a map that the County had drawn, it is the local responsibility to draw the map and submit it to the Legislature for approval. It goes to the reapportionment office before it comes on the House floor for discussion and passage to make sure that everything is accounted for and divided the way they should be by district.

Senator Robertson stated he wanted to make sure everyone understood the technical issues based on the map in case it needs to be adjusted. Adjustments and details were on the back of the small map provided. Senator Robertson stated they take the maps to the Reapportionment Office, and that office works out the new lines and checks all the numbers. They are under guidance of the Federal law related to the Voters Right Act. Senator Robertson stated when this starts they all hire their own Attorneys for marching orders as to what they, as elected officials, should do to stay within the law. They lean heavily on the expertise of the Reapportionment Office and Mr. Knight is available to answer any of the technical questions the Board may have.

Representative Buckner explained the three maps provided, the current map, the proposed map by Representative Jenkins and the draft Meriwether County CC/SB proposal were discussed. Most Counties that Representative Buckner has worked with start with the minimal and then adjust from there. None of

the Commissioners are drawn in the same District but are actually drawn into a District core of where each has been serving. They tried to fix as many split precincts as they could.

Commissioner Beth Neely-Hadley asked if the Board could get the population summary for the current District map. Mr. Knight shared the document on his screen as well as emailing it to the Clerk.

Commissioner Hines asked for more information regarding the precincts. Patty Threadgill explained that a split precinct has multiple Districts in it which creates more ballots. Senator Robertson provided more insight on this. Commissioner Hines stated on the old map Districts may split in the middle of the road. Senator Robertson stated they tried to keep as many communities together as possible and they looked at the community and county boundaries when drawing the map. There was additional discussion and explanation of this process.

Representative Jenkins stated on the map, they look for compact contiguous districts so that it does not divide communities of interest. The incumbent protection is basically that you protect all incumbents, or you protect no incumbents. This is necessary to keep from having a lawsuit. There was additional conversation in comparing the current population summary to what the new one is following the 2020 Census count.

Representative Buckner read from the documents provided and pointed out the population summary along with the deviation two districts have with documents provided population changes. Representative Jenkins stated the other significant thing involves the Voting Rights Act and the minority population and where that has moved. Representative Jenkins stated there is no Majority/Minority District in this County currently with those numbers unless he was reading them wrong. Representative Buckner understood there was one and asked Mr. Knight to speak on this. Representative Jenkins stated this was prior to redistricting and he did not see a prior number above 50%. Representative Buckner stated it was in how you define a minority, as all Black or all Hispanic, Black, and Non-White population and if counted together then there possibly could be a Majority/Minority district with all included together. They stated they would need to verify if District 2 would be that. A printed copy of the population summary was provided to the Board.

Mr. Knight explained where the Majority/Minority District was and where the new maps have Majority/Minority starting with the 2012 map with the 2020 data overlay. The largest African American, excluding other minorities population is in District 2 (44.05%) and the second is in District 4 (40.68%). This was based on the current district data. There was interest from all parties in abiding by the VRA in trying to get one of those Districts up to about 50%.. Mr. Knight stated his office uses the non-Hispanic population calculation. One way of looking at it is that it is the lowest amount of African American population depending how you take into account multiple race population and Hispanic population, the African American population could be considered higher than this. This would be the lowest it would be. District 2 on both maps represents more African American. In the 18137 Map, District 2 is above 50% minority and on the District 132 Map, District 1 is above.

Chairman Threadgill asked what the next steps were. Representative Buckner stated the Board would need to decide what they want. Senator Robertson confirmed with Mr. Knight that from the 2021 Map we had two Majority/Minority Districts. Senator Robertson stated based on 2010 population, and looking at the effective 2012 map, there were two Majority/Minority districts. Mr. Knight confirmed District 2 was the only Majority/Minority district. They could not get two districts the same above 50%. Representative Jenkins stated the question was based on the 2010 Census, the way it was prior to the population shift. Representative Buckner stated with the new proposal on the Map from Representative Jenkins, there would be a Majority/Minority District in District 1 and you would almost have one in District 5. Special Projects Director, Theron Gay, stated he felt with that with Mr. Jenkins configuration it would cause a

tremendous amount of work for the Elections Office. Chairman Threadgill stated with all the Board overlapping if it goes into effect they do not represent their people anymore. Examples were given such as District 4 would be elected by Manchester in the upcoming election. Representative Jenkins stated this map includes incumbent protection and their constituents may change as it did in the House and Senate as a result of the new maps last year. Special Projects Director, Theron Gay, felt this configuration will cause a lot of issues if Meriwether County follows the outline. Ms. Threadgill stated it is a lot of re-do on the map and includes the incumbent. Senator Robertson stated he had seen both maps and he was logical and not a politician. Every ten years the paperwork changes and previously Senator Robertson had part of Troup County but now has all of Troup County. Senator Robertson gave an example of the change. Senator Robertson understood the concerns shared by both Theron Gay and Patty Threadgill, but the reality is that Ms. Threadgill is just as professional as any other Election Supervisor. Representative Jenkins stated the instructions from the Joint Redistricting Office was to keep old precinct lines where possible and provide incumbent protection. Ms. Threadgill gave an example of a Board of Education member living in an area that would no longer be their district. Theron Gay stated what we are looking at is a population decrease of about 500 people and it makes better sense to tweak this map rather than wipe it clean. Representative Jenkins stated when you get into the maps sometimes you have a lot less options. He then provided examples.

Commissioner Plant wanted clarification. District 2 has highest percentage from the previous Census, and it will also have the highest percentage of the current one. Commissioner Plant stated they are basically drawing her out of her District. There was several maps and one had been on Facebook. Ms. Threadgill directed everyone to the maps that were provided today including the minimal change map from Representative Buckner. Commissioner Plant asked why we have to go so drastic with District 2 since we have been and are currently fine with minimal changes. Representative Jenkins stated to preserve a Majority/Minority District and not abide the community of interest across the north end of the County.

Commissioner Neely-Hadley stated if you have a Majority/Minority District you can't dictate to the people how they vote. Commissioner Plant may be in a Majority/Minority District, but they elected her just like where Commissioner Hines is now. She is not in the Majority/Minority District but was elected anyway. Representative Jenkins stated the population shifts and they should have the opportunity to change again. Senator Robertson addressed Commissioner Neely-Hadley and stated he said the same thing to some of the Attorneys in Atlanta and was told that is not the way the Courts look at it. Commissioner Plant asked where her District was on the map from Representative Jenkins. Representative Jenkins confirmed Commissioner Plant's home was in her District on the new map. Representative Jenkins stated we draw these maps for the community not for the politicians. The overall concern is to give the Communities Districts that represents their Communities.

Chairman Threadgill asked Representative Jenkins if he had given them a map, and did he draw out the map stating, "this is how I would like it to look." Representative Jenkins stated no. Chairman Threadgill asked how they came up with his map. Mr. Knight stated Representative Jenkins asked to define the map, have clearly defined boundaries, maintain VRA status Districts, and maintain the incumbents in their existing Districts. Representative Buckner asked Mr. Knight to explain how we have County Commission and School Boards having longer terms of office and not drawing a map to draw people out of their unfinished term of office. Mr. Knight stated that question was best answered by the Legislative Counsel's office. Mr. Knight spoke about this from experience not legally. The goal of redistricting is never to remove an incumbent or shorten an incumbents term by redistricting or causing them to have to run for office in a new District during the course of their term. Examples were given. Representative Jenkins stated to shorten an Elected Officials term requires a Public Referendum in accordance with Georgia Law. Chairman Threadgill stated he was just trying to figure out how much of a difference there was in a minimal change and how the Reapportionment Office comes up with such a map without some type of guidance. Senator Robertson stated some hire consultants to draw their maps and others will do it

themselves. An example was given of Harris County. Most of the time, Senator Robertson would ask that they show a new map based on the population growth and what it should look like without splitting precincts. With a lot of research from prior years, it is science once you factor in Majority/Minority and look at the factors of the two maps and what would make a deviation.

Commissioner Hines stated in getting back to the Majority/Minority, was it true that Georgia does not meet pre-clearance anymore. It was confirmed that was true. Commissioner Hines stated then it doesn't really make a difference. Senator Robertson stated the maps can still be challenged but they would be challenged afterwards and explained how it worked previously under President Obama's Department of Justice. If it were to be challenged today it would go to Court where it would be decided if the maps were right or wrong.

Representative Buckner stated both maps have a 50% Majority/Minority District. You can't always draw District for Majority/Minority where you want them to be because it has to be where the people are. Representative Buckner stated they are willing to work with Meriwether County if the Board wanted to come to Atlanta and sit down with Mr. Knight's office. They would be the one to say if it is in the standard deviation, etc.

Chairman Threadgill asked when the Board needed to have this ready. Representative Buckner stated the session starts the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in January 2022. Senator Robertson stated he Chairs the Committee on Ethics and represents us at the State Capitol, he will go with what the majority of the Commissioners and School Board decide. The responsibility belongs to the Commissioners. Representative Buckner agreed and stated this was the Board's decision and whatever was decided she would work with us any way she could. Representative Buckner stated if the Board gets this to her before now and January 11<sup>th</sup>, she will go ahead and take it to Legislative Counsel and get it drawn up and approved before it goes through the process. Chairman Threadgill stated the Board will add this on the next Agenda.

### **III. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

None

### **IV. CONCLUSION OF MEETING**

The Work Session concluded at 4:52 p.m.

### **V. FUTURE MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Future Meetings were listed on the Agenda.

Approved by: *Majority vote of the Board of Commissioners*

Attest: *Allyson L. Stephens, Deputy Clerk*

Date: *December 28, 2021*